

REVIEW ARTICLE:
THE APOCRYPHA:
THE LUTHERAN EDITION

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The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes,
 Edward A. Engelbrecht, gen. ed., Foreword by Paul L.
 Maier. St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2012, hc, 417 pp, \$39.99.

Study Guide to the Apocrypha, by Lane Burgland.
 St. Louis MO: Concordia, 2012, pb, 80 pp, \$5.00.

When *The Lutheran Study Bible (TLSB)* was published in 2009, probably there were not many people in the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods asking, “Why didn’t *TLSB* include the Apocrypha?” The *Concordia Self-Study Bible (CSSB)*, published in 1986, did not include it, although the four-page introduction to the intertestamental period in *CSSB* (1436-39) provided more information than most readers were aware of regarding the so-called “silent years” between Malachi and Matthew.

But according to the editors of *The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes (TATLE)* “one of the first questions that arose during the development of *TLSB* was whether we should include the Apocrypha.” They excluded it to prevent an already large book from getting even larger and because its inclusion would have further delayed production of *TLSB*. The editors also realized that including the Apocrypha without sufficient preparation of Lutheran readers “would likely [have caused] confusion and perhaps even offense” (xxi).

Yet, as LCMS historian Paul L. Maier notes in the Foreword to *TATLE*, few observers in church history have considered the Apocrypha heretical and many even regarded it as part of canonical Scripture. The codices of the Septuagint included the Apocrypha, and even without recognizing it as canonical many early Christians made use of it. Jerome included some of the apocryphal books in his Latin translation, the Vulgate. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians have regarded these books as *deuterocanonical*, that is, a second or secondary canon. Up to the Reformation, some included readings from the Apocrypha in worship while others did not, but ultimately “the inclusionaries won the day.” The Council of Trent actually anathematized as heretics those who did not accept the books of the Apocrypha, a decision the first Vatican Council confirmed in 1870 (xv-xvi).

Luther placed his translation of the books of the Apocrypha in a separate section of his German Bible, but he was clearly familiar with them. He called them “books which are not held to equal the sacred Scriptures” but “nevertheless useful and good to read” (AE 35:337). In his prefaces to the apocryphal books, Luther said some surprisingly positive things about many of them (AE 35: 335-52). Miles Coverdale’s first English translation of the Bible in 1535 followed Luther’s precedent, as did the King James Version in 1611. The Lutheran Confessions say that “the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with [all] teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments alone” (Formula of Concord, Epitome Summary, 1; *Triglotta*, 777), but the Confessors refrained from including a list of accepted and rejected books. By contrast, The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England¹ and The Westminster Confession of Faith² listed the biblical books included and excluded from the canon.

Still “for many reasons,” Maier wrote, “the Apocrypha remains very important to the Church.” They help to fill a key gap in our knowledge of the time between the Testaments, a period during which “the historical evidence is often quite sparse.” The apocryphal books provide “seminal concepts” concerning the historical and even theological teachings readers find in the New Testament (xvii-xviii).

The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes uses the English Standard Version (ESV) translation. It reprints, with some revisions and added historical notations, Raymond F. Surburg’s introduction to the historical eras between the Testaments (xiv-xc).³ Especially helpful is the editor’s arrangement of each of Surburg’s chapters into further subdivisions, the listings of ancient sources related to each time period, and numerous maps, charts, and illustrations to accompany the text. *TATLE* also reprints Surburg’s summary of the theological teachings of the time.⁴ Here too the editors added comments on intertestamental

¹Article VI of the Thirty-Nine Articles lists the 66 books of the Old and New Testament as those books “of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church,” but says of the Apocryphal books, “The church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners, but yet doth it not apply to them to establish any doctrine.” Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), 410-12.

²Chapter I, Article III of The Westminster Confession, after listing the Old and New Testament books, says: “The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the Canon of the Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.” Schaff, *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches*, 511-13.

³Raymond F. Surburg, *Introduction to the Intertestamental Period* (Concordia: St. Louis, 1975), 9-52.

⁴Surburg, *Introduction to the Intertestamental Period*, 61-79.

teaching on sin and on recent scholarship regarding Paul, the law, and early Judaism's understanding of salvation through the law (xxiv-xxv).

Following the apocryphal books, *TATTLE* contains numerous additional helps: discussions of the canonicity of the Apocrypha and its relation to the Old and New Testaments (262-68); the full text of other apocryphal books (1 and 2 Esdras, 3 and 4 Maccabees, Psalm 151) which were not included in Luther's German Bible (269-332); ten appendices containing brief introductions to the Elephantine Papyri, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, Josephus, Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Rabbinic Literature, the Nag Hammadi Codexes, and other intertestamental writings (333-57); and other resources directing readers "to passages in the Apocrypha that instruct, comfort, and illustrate the challenges and blessings faced by God's people" (359-417).

Concordia has also published a companion *Study Guide*, which lays out a seven session course through the Apocrypha. Readers can "gain firsthand experience in why our spiritual ancestors separated these books from Scripture," not because they were "banned" from the Bible by a devious plot but because "the Apocrypha did not convince [past] readers that these texts were inspired of God, inerrant, and authoritative." The Christian Church "did not create the Bible; it merely recognized the Word of God as the Word of God, different from all other works" (SG 46).

Introductions to Individual Books of the Apocrypha

The introduction to each apocryphal book contains a somewhat unusual opening paragraph or paragraphs, apparently an attempt to bring the story and its chief characters into a modern setting. The introduction to Judith, for example, begins:

"See how she remembers him," the women whispered to one another as the young widow passed through the market. They can see glimpses of sackcloth peeking out from her sleeves and her neckline. The days of mourning had passed, but she continued in the piety of one newly bereaved.

An older woman, herself a widow, reached out and gripped the young widow by the arm. "God has more for you, daughter. Your loss is great, but He has a calling for you" (5).

TLSB also introduces the biblical books in this way (see *TLSB* 8, on Genesis).

More helpful in the introductions to the individual apocryphal books are citations from Luther's Prefaces, followed by Johann Gerhard's comments on each book from *Theological Commonplaces*, Exegesis 1, *On the Nature of Theology and On Scripture*, usually consisting of the reasons that each book had been excluded from the canon.

The introductions also contain brief (sometimes too brief?) “Challenges for Readers” regarding setting, authorship, and other matters of introduction.

1 and 2 Maccabees

A two-page chart entitled “1 and 2 Maccabees: A Detailed Comparison,” lists side by side the events recorded in the two books, with the added remark that “1 Maccabees is generally believed to be the earlier and more chronological presentation of events” (195-96). Gerhard also commented that “the first book is to be preferred to the second.” *TATLE* calls 1 Maccabees “a most helpful historical account about the lives and struggles of God’s people in the second century B.C.” (157). The introduction to 1 Maccabees includes a detailed outline of the contents of that book (158) and a comparison of the two books of Maccabees to the writings of Josephus (159). The textual notes on 1 Maccabees make frequent cross references to Josephus’ account of this history in his *Antiquities*.

Helpful as these introductions are, however, they do not indicate with sufficient clarity that 1 and 2 Maccabees *do not* present a consecutive history of the period, as readers familiar with 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings would expect. Luther noted that although it is called the second book of Maccabees, “this cannot be true, because it reports several incidents before those reported in the first book” and extends only through the history of Judas Maccabeus (AE 35:352-53), while 1 Maccabees extends through the lives of Simon and Jonathan.

After very brief mention of the century and a half following the death of Alexander the Great, 1 Maccabees relates in gruesome detail the atrocities the Greek ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes inflicted on the Jewish people, dated at 167 B.C. Then 1 Maccabees describes how Mattathias, a priest of the Hasmonean family, refused Antiochus’ command to offer sacrifice to a pagan god and murdered a second priest who came forward to perform the sacrifice in his place. From there, 1 Maccabees narrates in extensive detail the revolt led by Mattathias’ sons Judas, Jonathan, and Simon. The time covered by 1 Maccabees is from 167 to 134 B.C.

2 Maccabees does not take up the history where 1 Maccabees left off; instead, it offers an alternate account of events that actually began *six years earlier* than Mattathias’ provocative action, about 173 B.C. The author of 2 Maccabees describes the pro-Hellenism actions of Jason and Menelaus, both of whom served as high priests. Antiochus is first introduced in 2 Maccabees chapter 5, and the remaining chapters of the book extend only into the time of Judas. The dates covered by 2 Maccabees are 173 to 161 B.C.

Here is a list of the events covered by the two books:

1 Maccabees		2 Maccabees	
Year	Event	Year	Event
		175	Jason outbids Onias III for the high priesthood and imposes a program of forced Hellenization
		172	Menelaus outbids Jason for the high priesthood and robs the temple vessels. Antiochus IV robs the temple
167	The temple cult is changed and persecution begins	167	The temple cult is changed, and persecutions and martyrdom ensues
164	The Jerusalem temple is recaptured, purified, and rededicated	164	The Jerusalem temple is recaptured, purified, and rededicated
163	Antiochus V and Lysias mount a campaign against Judea	163	Antiochus V and Lysias mount campaigns against Judea
161	Nicanor defeated by Judas	161	Judas defeats Nicanor.
160	Judas killed in battle and Jonathan acclaimed as his successor		
159	The high priest Alcimus dies and the high priesthood remains open until 152		
152	Alexander Balas replaces Demetrius I and appoints Jonathan as high priest		
142	Jonathan dies, and Simon replaces him		
134	Simon is killed, and John Hyrcanus succeeds him		

The chronological relationship of the two books of Maccabees could be illustrated like this:

1 Maccabees, 167–134 B.C.

2 Maccabees, 173–161 B.C.

Differences between the two books of Maccabees go beyond chronology. The accounts present different perspectives on the history that unfolded. Bruce Metzger explains that the two accounts “cover much of the same material but are written by two authors of quite different interests and capabilities.” He calls 1 Maccabees “the work of a plain and honest chronicler who set down the facts in their historical sequence, with scarcely any attempt to theorize upon them or to emphasize their significance,” and who “wished to glorify Israel and its heroic Maccabean leaders.”⁵ According to David deSilva, 1 Maccabees presents Judas and his brothers as “the legitimate rulers and, starting with Jonathan, high priests over the house of Israel.” The book “represents Hasmonean propaganda” for the purpose of lending “support and legitimation to the dynasty in a period in which that legitimacy is questioned.”⁶ James VanderKam adds that the writer of 1 Maccabees “expresses no concern that Jonathan and Simon become high priests although they were not from the traditional high-priestly family.”⁷

This pro-Hasmonean stance is especially evident in 1 Maccabees 14:4-15, in which the Maccabees’ restoration of freedom and safety is praised in language reminiscent of the description of Solomon’s rule, that “Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon (1 Kings 4:25 ESV) and echoing the messianic prophecy in Zechariah, “In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree” (Zechariah 3:10 ESV; see also Zechariah 8:11-12). Thus 1 Maccabees “obviously aims at the glorification of the Maccabean family, who are depicted as liberators of Judaism.”⁸ The author “is rightly credited with being a careful and ‘serious’ historian” who “sought to present an orderly account, preserving carefully the dates for major actions, and [using] archival materials wherever available to document the history,” yet his was not an “impartial” account.⁹

Though covering some of the same time period, the author of 2 Maccabees chose a different style of writing and presentation as “the vehicle for expressing his convictions about the way that God

⁵Bruce M. Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 129-31.

⁶David A. deSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context and Significance* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 248-49.

⁷James C. VanderKam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 65.

⁸Surburg, *Introduction to the Intertestamental Period* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1975), 121.

⁹deSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 255.

had worked in sacred history and again had operated in the events narrated in the book.” Instead of presenting Antiochus as the chief or only villain of the story, the Greek rulers are portrayed more as “instruments through which God chastised his people for their sins, such as their adoption of Hellenistic ways and their rejection of Israel’s covenant and laws.”¹⁰ Metzger regards 2 Maccabees as a less valuable historical account than 1 Maccabees because of its “palpable exaggerations” and “frequent moralizings,” yet he says that 2 Maccabees “throws welcome light on the development of Judaism before the beginning of the Christian era.” Its author displayed a “pronounced Pharisaic standpoint,” evident in his “confidence that God had ordained even the most minute affairs of His people and marvelously protected the sanctity of the Temple in Jerusalem.”¹¹

George Nickelsburg, in a 1971 article in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, highlighted these differences between the two books,¹² capsulized in the following chart:

<p>1 Maccabees was written to defend the legitimacy of the Hasmonean dynasty. The God of Israel used Judas and his brothers to overturn the Seleucid oppression, and the high priesthood now rested naturally, logically, and legitimately with the Hasmonean family.</p>	<p>2 Maccabees was written to demonstrate the link between Israel’s obedience to the law and its enjoyment of God’s blessings. In true covenant fashion, obedience brings blessings, but disobedience brings God’s judgment (3:1-3).</p>
<p>The chief villain of 1 Maccabees is Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who brutally tried to compel Hellenization (1:16-64; 6:11-13).</p>	<p>The chief villains of 2 Maccabees are Israel’s leaders, who eagerly embraced Hellenism (4:1-5:10).</p>
<p>Little attention is paid to the Jewish Hellenizers (1:11-15), and no mention is made of the escalating Jewish civil war which led Antiochus to limit the practice of Judaism (1:41-64).</p>	<p>Little attention is paid to Antiochus’ quelling of the Jewish riot (5:11). Antiochus is God’s instrument of judgment on people who have violated the covenant (4:37; 5:17-20).</p>

¹⁰VanderKam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism*, 68.

¹¹Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, 146; so also Surburg, *Introduction to the Intertestamental Period*, 124.

¹²George W.E. Nickelsburg, Jr., “1 and 2 Maccabees—Same Story, Different Meaning,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 42 (September 1971), 515-26.

Judas and his mighty deeds are eulogized, but his deeds are also regarded as actions of the God of Israel (4:6-11, 30-33; 5:61-64; 9:21,22).	Eleazar and the seven brothers and their mother are persecuted as punishment for Israel's sins, yet they are martyred because they refused to disobey the law and succumb to Hellenization (6:18-7:42).
Alcimus, the high priest before Jonathan, slaughtered a group of the Hasideans, but God struck him down and replaced him with Jonathan (7:12-17).	2 Maccabees never mentions Jonathan and Simon. At the end of the story, divine blessing has returned to Israel, the sanctuary has been cleansed, wickedness has been punished and righteousness rewarded.
The accomplishments of Simon and his brothers are praised as a return to the golden age of David and Solomon. The age of the Messiah has almost arrived (14:4-15).	But what of the violent deaths of these heroes? The answer lies in the resurrection: although condemned by a human court for disobeying the king's law, they will be vindicated in the resurrection because they obeyed "the King of the world" (7:10-11).
1 Maccabees supports the actions of the Maccabees.	2 Maccabees supports the piety of the Pharisees.

Judith

TATLE calls the story of Judith "likely fictional" (6) and textual notes at various points in the book of Judith point out "obvious historical inaccuracies that may have been intentional." The note on 4:3 says the story is "only loosely based on history, allowing the author to draw from a number of events and situations to make his point about faith in God and obedience to Moses" (11). The notes on 4:6 call Joachim "a fictional character drawn from other people in history" (11). The notes on 6:15 call Uzziah "a fictional character, perhaps drawn from the biblical Uzziah who ruled Judah in the first half of the eighth century BC" (14). Of the place names in 7:3, the notes suggest that "the author may well have created these towns with historical villages in mind, but we do not have any way to identify them" (14).

Metzger said that consensus among Protestant and Jewish scholars is that the story is "sheer fiction." The book "teems with chronological, historical, and geographical improbabilities and downright errors." Its opening lines "involve the most astonishing historical nonsense, for the author places Nebuchadnezzar's reign over the Assyrians (in reality he was king at Babylon) at Nineveh (which fell seven years before his accession!) at a time when the Jews had only recently returned from the captivity." Nebuchadnezzar "did not make war on Media (1:7) nor capture Ecbatana (1:14)." Bethulia, a city treated as

having great strategic importance in the story, is otherwise unknown. The rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem is dated “by a glaring anachronism, about a century too early” (4:13), and the Jewish state “is represented as being under the government of a high priest and a kind of Sanhedrin (6:6-14; 15:8), which is compatible only with a post-exilic date several hundred years after the book’s presumed historical setting.”¹³ Benedikt Otzen calls the book’s descriptions of geography “totally confused,” the topography of the book “bewildering,” and the description Holofernes’ campaign “astonishing.”¹⁴

Luther recognized these historical and geographical errors. “If one could prove from established and reliable histories that the events in Judith really happened,” he wrote, it “would be a noble and fine book” and “should properly be in the Bible. Yet it hardly squares with the historical accounts of the Holy Scriptures.” He noted the conclusion of some that Judith was not an accurate historical account (*Geschichte*) but a beautiful religious fiction (*Gedichte*), written by “a holy and religious man who wanted to sketch and depict therein the fortunes of the whole Jewish people and the victory God always miraculously granted them over all their enemies.” This interpretation appealed to Luther; he proposed that the writer had “deliberately and painstakingly inserted the errors of time and name in order to remind the reader that the book should be understood as that kind of a sacred, religious composition” (AE 35:338).

Though historically inaccurate, the purpose of the book of Judith “is evident: to arouse the spirit of nationalism and patriotism in a time of great national calamity.”¹⁵ Metzger considers Judith “one of the best examples of early Jewish story-telling,” probably composed by a Palestinian Jew who “wished both to encourage his people in resisting their enemies and to inculcate a strict observance of the Law of God.”¹⁶ The character of Judith in many ways “exemplified the legalistic Pharisaic piety of the Maccabean era.” She was scrupulous in observing the new moon and the Sabbath, as later required by the Pharisees, and she abstained from food at appropriate times (8:6). She understood that Israel’s difficulties were the direct result of sin (5:17f.; 11:10). She believed that “salvation would only come through trust in and obedience to the divine will.” She exemplified how God often used the weak to confound the strong (9:10).¹⁷

¹³Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, 50-51.

¹⁴Benedikt Otzen, *Tobit and Judith* (Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha) Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 81.

¹⁵Surburg, *Introduction to the Intertestamental Period*, 103.

¹⁶Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, 44.

¹⁷Roland K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 1217.

Yet Judith also was eager to commit treachery and deception in murdering Holofernes. Her story serves as a fictional apologetic for the Maccabean revolt. The Maccabees were also careful to observe many of the Mosaic laws yet concluded they must fight to defend themselves even on the Sabbath and they extended their revolt through bloodshed and forced compliance to Sinai laws.

Tobit

The book of Tobit also presents a fictional character careful to obey the laws of Moses, even if his faithfulness resulted in suffering. *TATLE* calls it “not likely that Tobit was either living during the secession of the northern tribes from Judah or that he was also among those deported under Tiglath-Pileser” (58), since those events occurred almost 200 years apart. The text note on 1:4 says that “the difference in time between the dividing of Israel from Judah [ca. 931] and the Assyrian exile [ca. 722] shows that the account is not historical” (59). The textual notes at 6:2; 9:6 and 14:15 recognize additional historical inaccuracies or impossibilities (65, 68, 72).

Other commentators and introductions to the book of Tobit make this point in more direct language. Metzger calls the story “entirely unhistorical”¹⁸ and Harrison regards it as “completely unhistorical.”¹⁹ Otzen suggests that the story “seems to stem from tales known in international folkloristic literature,” which was “taken up by the Jews” and later retold as “a Jewish fairy-tale.” By this retelling of the story, “the center of gravity in the narrative was moved” so that “what we have in the apocryphal book of Tobit is a story about divine reward bestowed upon those that are faithful to the Law of Moses and who never fail in their trust in Providence.”²⁰

The *Study Guide* helpfully remarks, “Scripture clearly teaches that we are saved by grace through faith in the Lord and His Messiah alone,” but the author of Tobit “doesn’t really engage the theme of grace in his book, creating a tension for Christian readers” (SG 64).

¹⁸Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, 37.

¹⁹Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1212.

²⁰Otzen, *Tobit and Judith*, 2. Otzen writes further regarding the date of composition: “There is little evidence on which to date the book of Tobit. When, in the nineteenth century, critical scholars gave up placing the book close to the events related, that is, in the seventh century B.C.E., they soon agreed that the whole tenor of the book indicated a date in the Hellenistic period, that is, between 300 B.C.E. and the Herodian era.” Today “a date immediately before the Maccabean crisis is preferred.” Because most scholars consider “the violent hatred of the foreigners that is typical of the Maccabean era” to be absent from the book, they date its authorship at about 200 B.C.E. The author, “apparently a pious and gifted Jew,” was “law-abiding and well-read in the Scriptures, well-informed about conditions in the Diaspora” (57-59).

Metzger calls Tobit “a valuable historical source for our knowledge of Jewish piety and family life in the second century before Christ.”²¹ DeSilva agrees that the book provides “an outstanding witness to the values cherished by Jews in the Second Temple period,” and these values helped the Jewish community to maintain their identity and solidarity against the threat of being assimilated into Hellenistic culture.²² Harrison suggests that we may view Tobit’s character as “the precursor and exemplar of the later orthodox Jews who sought to establish the pattern of their lives upon the basis of what have been called the ‘three pillars of Judaism,’ namely almsgiving, fasting, and prayer” (12:8; see also 1:16; 11:14; 12:9; 2:4; 3:1ff.; 6:17; 8:5ff.).²³

Yet some statements placed in the mouth of Tobit were the chief reason for the book’s rejection from the canon. Tobit says that almsgiving “delivers from death” (4:10) and that it will “purge away every sin” (12:9; see also 14:11). *TATLE* comments on 4:10 that this verse “expresses an idea that reappears later in this book as well as elsewhere in the Apocrypha,” that “almsgiving actually earns divine forgiveness” (63; see Ecclesiasticus 3:30). On 12:9, *TATLE* says, “Note how easily this teaching may be misunderstood and lead to false teaching about righteousness before God and salvation” (70).

The *Apology* explains how the words of Tobit 4:11 “ought to be received.” His statement should not “detract from the praise of Christ, whose prerogative it is to free from sin and death.”

[For]without Christ the doctrine of the Law is of no profit. Therefore those alms please God which follow reconciliation or justification, and not those which precede. . . . We ought to embrace faith and its fruits. So here we must say concerning alms that this entire newness of life saves. . . . Alms also are the exercises of faith, which receive the remission of sins. . . . Wherever in the Scriptures good works are praised, we must always understand them according to the rule of Paul, that works must not be elevated above Christ. . . . And the address of [Tobit], regarded as a whole, shows that faith is required before alms (*Apology* III, 156-58; *Triglotta* 199).

Additions to Daniel and the Prayer of Manasseh

Pious Jews living between the Testaments chose what may seem to us to be unlikely heroes. Apocryphal authors pay scant attention to Abraham, Moses, or David but praise Josiah, Ezra, and Zerubbabel for their faithfulness to Israel’s laws, their efforts in bringing Judean exiles back to the land, and their zeal in removing pagan influences

²¹Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, 37.

²²DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 74.

²³Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1212-13.

surrounding them. For these reasons they served as valuable examples for Jews struggling against the temptation to embrace Hellenism. The accounts in the canonical book of Daniel show how he stood up for God's laws under threat of punishment and death in Babylon. The account in 2 Chronicles 33 of Manasseh's gross idolatry followed by his fervent repentance offered assurance that even the greatest of sinners could repent and receive God's forgiveness.

Yet the Apocryphal Additions to Daniel and the falsely-ascribed Prayer of Manasseh cannot be considered historically dependable. *TATLE* explains that the earliest manuscripts of Daniel 1-12 "have confirmed the reliability of the original Hebrew/Aramaic text," but "these manuscripts do not include the apocryphal Daniel stories" (242). In addition, the context of these Additions "assumes a settled Judean community in Mesopotamia rather than the newly arrived Judean exiles described in the biblical book of Daniel" (242). Specifically on the Prayer of Azariah, *TATLE* says that some of its features "seem to fit the character of Jewish concerns and teaching in the second century B.C.," and the statement in Azariah's prayer (verse 15) that there was "no prince or prophet or leader" in the land fits the second century B.C. better than the sixth (251). *TATLE*'s introduction to Bel and the Dragon encourages readers to "rejoice in the wonderful storytelling style," says these stories "read like little detective novels," and notes how "the Daniel character uses careful reasoning and appeals to evidence in defense of his confession of faith" (247), but does not say the story actually happened. More directly, Gerhard wrote: "These additions do not have a prophetic author" and their main character "cannot be taken to mean the famous prophet whose canonical prophecy is extant." The Additions to Daniel "conflict with historical truth" (246-47).

Regarding the Prayer of Manasseh, *TATLE* reports that "most scholars think that a later writer [later than the author of 2 Chronicles] composed the prayer as a guide to sincere repentance." This fictitious prayer was meant to "fill in the material missing from Chronicles by giving the words of the king's prayer" (257), yet in spite of this pious intention, Gerhard concluded, "That this book is outside the canon is obvious" (256).

Additions to Esther

Unlike Daniel or Manasseh, the main character in canonical Esther presented quite different problems for readers during the intertestamental period. She seems not to have lived a pious or observant Jewish life but succumbed to the Persian way of life,²⁴ yet she

²⁴See John F. Brug, *The People's Bible: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1985), 155: "The [canonical] book [of Esther] is deliberately written in a secular

rose to become queen of the empire and acted heroically to rescue her people from annihilation. As *TATLE* maintains, the Hebrew book of Esther without Greek additions stands on its own as “a well-composed history of how Esther delivered her people from destruction by Haman.” Yet later writers created “Additions to Esther,” also called the “Old Greek Esther,” in an attempt to “improve upon the story” for “a variety of reasons,” chief among them to make the story “more clearly religious” and to answer “questions about the activities and motives of the persons in the story” (228). Gerhard noted many details in the Additions “that conflict with the canonical book of Esther,” and *TATLE* acknowledges that Gerhard’s criticisms might offer “a helpful illustration of how Old Greek Esther simply does not piece together well with the chapters of the Hebrew text” (228).

The *Study Guide* draws several comparisons between canonical Esther and the Additions which, while true, do nothing to support the historical reliability of the Additions. The author of the Additions changed Haman’s nationality from Amalekite to Macedonian, which the *Study Guide* says “aligns the story of Esther so it conforms to the world of the second century B.C.” by making Haman “an enemy everyone can hate” (SG 68). Mordecai’s dream, absent from the canonical version but present in the Additions, is justified as an updating of the story of Esther “to the type of Jewish literature common in the second century B.C. through the first century A.D.” (SG 68-69). The reader may too easily be led to believe that such updating and revision of canonical Esther was justified, even beneficial, although the revisions have no historical merit.

Metzger is not as kind to the Additions. Though he acknowledges that the intentions of the “the Greek continuator” (as he calls the author of the Additions) may have been laudable, the result is “far from being entirely commendable.” Their literary style is “wordy, not to say bombastic,” but “more serious are the discrepancies and contradictions” this “continuator” introduced. Metzger criticizes the very “revisions” that the *Study Guide* seems to endorse. Metzger is especially critical of “the increase in anti-Semitism and the answering hostility against the Gentiles which are to be found in the Additions (for

style to reflect the point of view of a person living outside of the Holy Land in an unholy heathen kingdom. The secular style of the book may account for the near absence of religious elements from the work. It may also be that Mordecai and Esther were not particularly religious in their daily lives. Unlike Daniel and his friends, Esther may have hid her faith. God is certainly not limited to using models of personal piety to accomplish his purposes. It is possible that the lack of piety in the book is an accurate reflection of the life style of Esther who had conformed to the Persian way of life. The absence of God’s name and the lack of piety in the book are actually strong evidence for the authenticity of the [canonical] book.”

example, 10:10)." This anti-Semitic tone may have been "understandable" given the historical background of the Additions, but this is hardly offset by the repeated use of the name of God in the Additions, meant to offset the absence of the name of God in canonical Esther.²⁵

Ecclesiasticus

The initial impression many readers have of the book of Ecclesiasticus (also known as Sirach or the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach) is that it offers many passages of practical wisdom similar to those found especially in canonical Proverbs. *TATLE* correctly notes, however, that on significant biblical teachings, Ecclesiasticus is not in harmony with the Hebrew Wisdom writings and certainly out of line with New Testament teachings.

Ecclesiasticus "presents ideas about atonement that stray from biblical teaching (3:3, 30; 20:28; 35:3)." These passages describe trust "in a personal righteousness rather than in the forgiveness of sins that God promises through blood atonement, as described in the Law of Moses" (74). On 3:3, *TATLE* warns that "keeping the Mosaic Law began wrongly to be understood as a way to gain merit and remove sin" (78).

Regarding free will, Ecclesiasticus "strongly emphasizes the freedom of the human will and overstates human ability to do what is right" (15:14-17; p. 74). Ecclesiasticus 15:14 says the Creator left mankind "in the power of his own choice"; *TATLE* counters that because "Adam and Eve threw in their lot with Satan of their own free will," the result has been that "all their children were born with their wills aligned with Satan and bound over to sin." It is "correct to say that in the fall mankind lost true freedom of will" (93). In the next verse, Ecclesiasticus insisted that "if you desire, you will keep the commandments," and "life and death are put in front of people, and whichever one chooses will be given to him" (15:15, 17). *TATLE* disagrees: "We have a choice in how to act—and yet Scripture says that we are bound in sin." Human free will is limited to "earthly matters." Further, "we can choose to avoid outright adultery, murder, and thievery—but that does not mean that we have kept the whole law" (93).

On life after death, Ecclesiasticus "emphasizes the permanence of death (17:27-28; 38:16-23) and did not clearly differentiate punishments or rewards in the afterlife" (74). *TATLE* notes internal disagreement in the book on this subject; 44:16; 46:12; 48:11; and 49:10 seem to suggest that the author did in fact believe in an afterlife (74).

The *Study Guide* rightly says that Ecclesiasticus "seems well grounded in the Torah (the Hebrew Scriptures) and its application to

²⁵Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, 62-63.

daily life,” yet a closer look reveals the author’s negative attitude toward women and his apparent belief that good works, such as almsgiving, are sufficient to atone for sins. Some topics Ecclesiasticus addressed “seem a bit superficial (for example, table manners at banquets)”; while good manners are somewhat important, “that’s not what convicts us of our sins or leads us to our Savior” (SG 49). The *Study Guide* credits the author with having “a good grasp of the fear of the Lord” yet notes that Ecclesiasticus connected “fear of the Lord to the commandments of God (23:27),” implying that “the person who keeps these will always receive material blessing from the Lord (see 2:10; 40:26).” The author’s “understanding of the fear of the Lord is somewhat mechanical and fails to take into account God’s will for the individual in the plan of salvation” (SG 50-51).

Some sections of Ecclesiasticus even seem to support a doctrine of double predestination, in which God selects some to go to heaven but chooses others to go to hell. “Not only does this contradict [the author’s statements] in chapter 15, but it also deviates from Scripture’s comforting teaching that our election of God is anchored solidly and firmly in the cross of Christ. Those who face condemnation on the Last Day have only themselves to blame” (SG 53).

Baruch and the Letter of Jeremiah

The Book of Baruch begins with the assertion that “these are the words of the book that Baruch son of Neraiah . . . wrote in Babylon” (1:1), but *TATLE* notes that “there is no evidence that Baruch was in Babylon.” Canonical Jeremiah “indicates that Baruch was taken to Egypt (Jer 43:5-7).” This assertion brings the supposed “authorship by the biblical Baruch into question” (144). It is generally agreed that the book of Baruch “is of much later origin, having nothing to do with the time of the Babylonian captivity.”²⁶

Baruch 3:37 says, “Afterward she appeared upon earth and lived among humans.” Overzealous commentators have occasionally taken this verse to refer to the incarnation of Christ, but context makes it plain that “she” refers not to Christ but to wisdom personified. Metzger remarks that “in view of the notorious lack of exegetical discrimination displayed by many [Church] Fathers, it is not surprising that the natural meaning of these words was abandoned for a mystical interpretation that saw here a witness to the doctrine of the incarnation.” Because Orthodox opponents of Arian Christology often cited this passage as proof of the deity of Christ, it was “quite understandable” that “the Church was tempted to regard as canonical the book

²⁶Surburg, *Introduction to the Intertestamental Period*, 111-12.

which contained a sentence that lent itself to so convenient a use in theological debate."²⁷ In its note on 3:37, *TATLE* says, "Chrysostom and Augustine cite this passage to support the incarnation of Jesus" (148). One wishes *TATLE* had more clearly disavowed the interpretation of this verse by Chrysostom and Augustine.

Wisdom of Solomon

In the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Egypt during the intertestamental period, "the artistry and learning of [the Jews'] new neighbors both fascinated and repulsed them." Wisdom of Solomon "borrowed the literary artistry of Hellenism in order to illustrate the foolishness of their Hellenistic doctrines and outlook on life." The unknown author, most likely an Alexandrian Jew, "used their language and style to refute them and argue for the superiority of the biblical wisdom tradition" (27). But *TATLE* says clearly that "the obvious Greek style and philosophical influences make it clear that the Hebrew king Solomon did not write the book" (28).

Luther believed the Wisdom of Solomon contained "many good things" and pronounced the book "well worth reading" (AE 35:340-44). The *Study Guide* adds that early Christians "found a lot to like in the Wisdom of Solomon," possibly because some thoughts expressed there seem to echo statements in canonical Scripture (for example 13:10-19; compare Isaiah 49:18-20; 44:9-20; Romans 1:18-23). Yet "the one key element missing in the Wisdom of Solomon is the figure of a redeemer" (SG 56-57).

In Wisdom of Solomon as in Baruch, some commentators have found Christ in passages where he is not there. Wisdom 14:7 proclaims, "Blessed is the wood by which righteousness comes." Some have taken this verse to refer to the cross of Christ, but here too context makes it obvious that the writer was referring to the wood of Noah's ark. *TATLE* does not refer to this imaginative "Christological" interpretation of 14:7.

The editors of *TATLE* "envisioned adult users of this book, especially those who are familiar with the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments." Perhaps over-optimistically, they expect that this edition of the Apocrypha "will be used in churches, universities, and seminaries" for both academic and devotional purposes. *TATLE* provides "A Reading Guide" (xxvii-xxix) with a schedule to complete the entire Apocrypha in nineteen weeks, in conjunction with readings from canonical Scripture. A section entitled "Getting Started" (xxxiii-

²⁷Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, 94.

xxxiv) presents a brief summary of the events and literature between the Testaments. "The Holy Scripture and Other Ancient Writings" (xxxv) mentioned that "curiosity about books that were not included in the Holy Bible has greatly increased in recent times" with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other extra-biblical documents, as well as popular writings and television shows raising questions about "lost books of the Bible."

True, yet one wonders how many church members, or even how many pastors, will become more interested in the Intertestamental period because of this or any other publication. A common saying among farmers is, "I already know how to farm three times better than I have time to do." Many pastors may say something similar about Bible study. Only a fraction of the members of most Lutheran churches attend congregational Bible study of any kind, and they typically devote their study to the most familiar biblical books. Even in a rich, well-structured Bible study curriculum, some books of the canonical Scriptures receive scant attention. One wonders how great the enthusiasm would be in most congregational Bible classes to study works of history, fiction, and poetry that "aren't even in the Bible."

Still, for those who are interested and determined to learn more about what happened between the Testaments, *The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes* is clearly the best choice available, and not only for Lutheran pastors and readers. It is certainly true that the more we understand the events of those "Silent Years," the better we will also understand the world into which our Savior came.